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Criteria used by University Administrators in Parental Notification for Students with Mental Health Concerns

Margaret L. Sarnicki

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This thesis submitted by Margaret L. Sarnicki in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the Graduate Faculty

**CRITERIA USED BY UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS IN PARENTAL
NOTIFICATION FOR STUDENTS WITH
MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS**

by

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B.S. Mankato State University, 1983

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Science

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Donna Nunez
Dean
School of Graduate Studies

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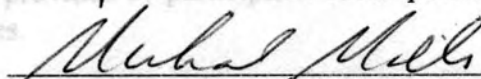
Margaret L. Sarnicki

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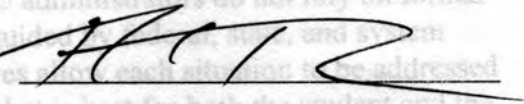
The results of this study were obtained through semi-structured interviews of one administrator at each of the seven MnSCU universities. Participation was based on identification of the administrator making the majority of parental notification decisions at each institution. Three of the interviews were conducted in person and two were phone interviews. Field notes were taken and audio recordings of each interview were done. Each interview was transcribed in its entirety. The data were analyzed through review by an outside observer and feedback provided by participants during the interview and the collective identified themes.

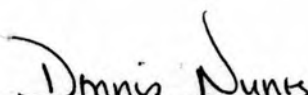


Chairperson



Results indicated that while MnSCU administrators do not rely on formal policies for parental notification, they are guided by state and system regulations. Informal criteria and procedures were used to address each situation individually and decisions to be made on what is best for both the student and the University. Expectations for parental notification included supporting student and University decisions, providing information, taking the student home, if needed, and coordinating follow-up care. All of the participants articulated both positive and negative experiences in parental notification. While the Virginia Tech tragedy has not changed the number of parental notifications, at the institutions studied, participants said it had been the catalyst for more numerous and extensive discussions relating to campus safety, identification of students of concern, and the impetus for Student Behavioral Intervention Teams.




Dean
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Several related themes also emerged as significant. These included an increase in the number of students with significant mental health issues, the importance of collaboration between divisions of the University and with community partners, and the lack of campus resources to meet student mental health needs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

0

Month Year

Approved by Research Committee:

Christine M. Imbra Chairperson
Christine M. Imbra

Dr. Imbra has patiently guided me through the Higher Education Administration program. From the classroom to advising, her advice has been invaluable. Dr. Mills and Dr. Reff have added their professional knowledge and passion for higher education to the evaluation of this thesis.

Being a part of several cohorts has enabled me to learn from many professionals and future professionals in the higher education field. Their perspectives have added much to my understanding. Special thanks to my thesis writing partner, Robin. The number 210 will always hold meaning for me.

For the past 2 years I have been learning the vision and the details of student affairs under Dr. Overland, Dr. Gillilan, and Mr. Bullisco's leadership in the Division of Student Life and Development. Their philosophy of caring for students and working tirelessly towards the goal of creating a University that provides challenge and support for its students has been wonderful preparation for a higher education career.

My best friend, Sherry, has seen so little of me these past few years, and I have missed her. But, we have yet to see the world together, so we will wipe the dust off our suitcases and start planning our next adventure at the completion of my degree.

My kids are probably more excited to see this thesis done than I am. They have matured much for the cause and have learned to never ask "How is your thesis coming?" Being along as they walk through their own college experience has added much to the depth of my understanding of the challenges and opportunities for growth

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for those who have contributed to this work and, in truth, have been along for part, or all, of my journey, of which this document is merely a chapter.

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My extended family, especially my mom and dad, have been so influential in all that I am and all that I do. Their example of community service, and lifelong learning, in addition to unwavering support of all my dreams, cannot be underestimated. They will always be my example of love and caring.

My husband, Mark, has been my biggest cheerleader and the calm through many storms. I especially appreciate these past few years when he patiently supported all three of our children and I through college.

-Dr. Paul R. McHugh, former chairman of the
Department of Psychiatry at John Hopkins School of
Medicine (2009)

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The tragedy at Virginia Polytechnic University in the spring of 2007 and the resulting Governor's Report on the Virginia Tech Shootings (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007) have spurred colleges and universities to reevaluate their plans for addressing crisis situations and, more specifically, how at-risk students are identified, assessed, and addressed. One highlight of the Governor's Report was the failure of the University to contact the parents of Seung Hui Cho, the shooter, as part of the University's response to his lengthy pattern of troubling behavior. At many institutions, privacy laws, specifically the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Health Insurability Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) are often cited, as they were in the Virginia Tech case, as the reason why parents are not notified when a university student's behavior indicates a mental health issue.

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA) (Appendix A) adds additional restrictions to the disclosure of student information in this state. Under the strictest interpretation, the only situation in which parents can be notified is an articulate and immediate threat to the student's health and safety or to the safety of others. The

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

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Virginia Tech tragedy has opened the door to reexamine these laws and question whether there are less imminent situations when it is permissible and beneficial to notify parents.

The historical framework for the complex relationship between parents, students, and the university is *in loco parentis*, in place of parents (Henning, 2007). This philosophy, the accepted standard since 1913, asserts that parents transfer authority and responsibility to the university. In the 1960s, new expectations emerged. Spurred on by older students, a culture of challenging authority, lowering the age of majority, and increasing litigation, other perspectives of the student, parent, and university relationship developed (Beckham & Dagley, 2005). Researchers disagree on the exact form the relationship now takes (American College Health Association, 2008; Henning, 2007).

Another dynamic in the parent, student, and university triad is that students invite parental involvement into their university experience in ways, and to degrees, unheard of in the past. The 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that students have frequent and meaningful communication with their parents and report family as more influential than friends. A positive relationship with a parent is associated with stronger engagement at the university and a more positive outlook on life.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's Transition Theory provides "insights into factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment that are likely to determine the degree of

Statement of the Problem

With college students presenting increasing mental health issues (Gallagher, 2007), the criteria used in addressing how at-risk students are identified, assessed, and responded to needs to be reevaluated and strengthened. An understanding of the role of parents in an intervention plan is needed. This study explored the formal policies and informal criteria Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU) family administrators use to make parental notification decisions for students whose mental health places them at-risk. The expectations of parental contact and if those expectations are realized was studied.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the criteria Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System administrators use in making the decision to notify parents when a student's behavior indicates a mental health issue. In addition, administrators' expectations of parental contact and if those expectations were realized, was examined. Finally, the role of the Virginia Tech tragedy in influencing an institution's approach to contacting parents was explored. The study used semi-structured interviews of one administrator at each of the seven MnSCU Universities as data for the study.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's Transition Theory provides, "insights into factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment that are likely to determine the degree of

impact a given transition will have at a particular point in time” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 107). Schlossberg defined four factors that determine the assets and liabilities an individual has for reacting to life transitions; situation, self, support, and strategies. There are four main types of support—intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities. Certainly, when a student is experiencing mental health concerns, all possible supports, including family, are important to consider.

As institutions utilize all available information and resources in addressing the needs of students with mental health concerns, assessing if parents have been a source of support in the past and are likely to be of assistance in the current situation is important. How institutions make the determination of contacting parents for support was the focus of this study.

Assumptions of the Study

For the purpose of this study, several assumptions were made.

1. Parental notification occurs when a student is at risk, but the situation is not imminent.

2. Parents are notified for a purpose, with specific expectations for their involvement.

3. Not all parents will respond to notification in the same way.

4. Administrators use discretion in determining if a situation has risen to the level of imminent threat.

5. Each institution will have policies, procedures, and protocols for parental notification.

Delimitations of the Study

The following delimitations pertain to this study:

1. Only the seven universities within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System were utilized.
2. Only one administrator at each institution was interviewed.
3. The focus was on mental health concerns. Academic, alcohol, and other drug and physical health concerns were not explored.
4. Only the current laws and regulations that directly affect university contact with parents, specifically FERPA, ADA, HIPAA, and MGDPA were examined. Policies unique to individual institutions were not considered.
5. The focus was not on situations in which parental notification is permitted by law, namely those in which the student poses an imminent threat of danger to self, others, or property.

Research Questions

Three research questions relating to the notification of parents for a student at risk for mental health concerns were addressed.

1. What are the formal, written policies at MnSCU universities regarding parental notification of students at risk for mental health concerns?

2. What criteria are being used to make a parental notification decision when the policy is unclear or not applicable to the situation?
3. What is the administrator's expectation for parental involvement and, based on past experience, was the expectation realized?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are provided for

clarification:

1. *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. 1990 Federal law prohibiting discrimination of persons with documented physical or mental disabilities.
2. *At-risk student*. A student identified by a university employee as being significantly affected in his or her ability to continue educational progress or where a concern exists about the mental health of the student due to behavior that endangers self or others. The terms troubled or distressed are also used in the literature.
3. *Administrator*. A university employee whose responsibilities include making decisions regarding the health and welfare of students and who has the authority to represent the university in disclosing student information to parents.
4. *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*. A 1974 Federal Law, also known as the Buckley Amendment, that provides limitations for the release of student educational records. In recent years, the Department

Department of Education has released several clarifications concerning parental

notification under FERPA.

5. *Health Insurability Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)*. A 1996 Federal Law that protects the privacy of a patient's health records and provides conditions for release of those records.

6. *Imminent threat*. A directed and articulated statement or behavior which indicates a significant risk of harm to self or others.

7. *Mental health concern*. A psychological concern, whether diagnosed or not, that significantly affects a student's ability to reach his or her academic and personal goals, and is evidenced by behavior that affects functioning and/or negatively affects self and others.

8. *Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA)*. The Minnesota state law that protects the privacy of an individual's records. In some cases, such as parental notification for alcohol and other drug violations, this Act is more restrictive than FERPA.

9. *Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU)*. The Minnesota public higher education system comprised of technical colleges, community colleges, and seven 4-year universities.

10. *Parent*. The person(s) who is identified by the student as his or her emergency contact. This may be a parent, guardian, grandparent, extended family member, or non-relative.

Human Instrument

While the goal of research is to be objective, in practice, this is impossible. The human factor, whether overt or covert in its biases, is a variable in any study. With that in mind, my perspective is detailed for the reader in hopes that my biases will be transparent. First, I am a parent of three college students. As with other parents, I have had to find the balance between being involved with my children's college experience and accepting that most aspects of their lives are theirs to manage. I also expect that the institutions my children attend will contact me if there is a serious concern.

Second, I work in Student Life and Development and have responsibilities for students of concern, including membership on the Student Behavioral Intervention Team. My philosophical position before commencing the study was that, most of the time, parents can be a source of information and support in instances when their college student is struggling, and would welcome contact by the university. I felt that federal and state laws limit or prevent the involvement of parents when university officials may want to include them, especially in cases when the student concern could be deemed less than an imminent threat. However, I also believe that college provides a unique and necessary opportunity for students to develop skills in self-advocacy, and both the university and parents should have this essential growth and learning as a goal. Third, through teaching Introduction to Psychology classes at the college level, many students have shared their personal mental health stories with me, and there have been mental health issues in my family. All of these experiences combine to give a personal perspective to both this topic and the findings of the study.

Summary

Contacting parents when a student's behavior puts him or her at risk is a decision university administrators often make. The higher education, legal, and societal climate in recent years has changed the dynamics of this decision. School shootings, most prominently at Virginia Tech, have shown the need to reevaluate how current laws are interpreted. Many institutions have recently re-examined their policies, and the Department of Education has released new guidelines for interpreting the complex decision of when it is permissible to notify parents under FERPA. In addition, administrators must make a parental notification decision when laws or policies are unclear or not applicable to the situation. An examination of the expectations of administrators and how those expectations compared to their experience was also a focus of this study.

Chapter II will examine the literature in regards to students, parents, and universities and the history that defines the relationship among these stakeholders. An introduction to student mental health issues will also be addressed, in addition to the role of the Virginia Tech incident. Finally, an examination of the applicable laws related to parental notification will be reviewed.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Research on the student-university relationship, the role of parents in the university experience, and the societal factors that influence those relationships such as regulatory requirements, mental health issues, and the need to balance campus safety with individual rights, create a challenge for administrators. A review of relevant research provides a foundation for understanding the issues related to this study.

Review of the Research

Today's students and parents present challenges and bring expectations to the university experience that were unknown in the past. The following is an overview of the changing dynamic of students, parents, and university as influenced by society and history. The critical issues relating to the mental health of university students are also addressed, including the importance of Virginia Tech in strengthening policies for addressing students at risk. Finally, a summary of the applicable federal and state laws pertaining to parental notification are reviewed.

Perspectives

Each of the three stakeholders—students, parents, and the university—have a unique perspective with challenges, needs, and expectations that influence their relationships.

Parent Perspective

While the ultimate goal for all three constituencies is the student's graduation, the dynamic roles that each have in relation to each other is in constant change. The following provides an overview of each of these stakeholders.

Student Perspective

The millennial generation brings many expectations to campus. They are the most watched-over generation in memory, with “The typical day of a child, tween, or teen has become a nonstop round of parents, relatives, teachers, babysitters, counselors, chaperones, minivans, surveillance cams, and curfews” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 17). They have grown up believing they are special and their world is guided by adults, specifically parents, in achieving their dreams. Far from the rebellious attitudes that former generations exhibited, more than 9 out of 10 students say they trust and feel close to their parents (Howe & Strauss, 2007). However, emotional ties are not the only ones that connect students to their parents. The National Study on Student Engagement (NSSE) (2007) states that 7 out of 10 students communicated “very often” with at least one parent or guardian during the academic year. Mothers were the most common communicant, with conversations centering on personal issues, academic performance, and family matters. Financial ties also exist. In a MnSCU (2005) study, 25% of

students reported their parents pay for some of their college expenses, and of those students, 25% said their parents pay all of their tuition and fees. Clearly, students are tied to their parents emotionally, technologically, and financially.

Parent Perspective

Parents today have been labeled as “helicopter parents” (Carney-Hall, 2008) or those who hover over the details of students’ lives and intervene with university officials on students’ behalf. NSSE (2007) results indicated that 38% of freshmen and 29% of seniors said their parent or guardian frequently or sometimes intervened on their behalf to help them solve problems. Donovan and McKelfresh (2008) noted the most extreme are called Black Hawk, Stealth Fighters, Bulldozers, or Paratrooper parents. These negative images are contrasted by the perspective of “families trying their best to support their college student” (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008, p. 386). They offered the alternative image of Umbrella Parents. It visualizes a parent standing next to the student, holding an umbrella. When it rains, the parent opens the umbrella over the student. Universities have responded to increased parental involvement with parent coordinators, parent orientations, and an admissions department responsive to the parent who “co-purchases” a college. In the past, college student development theorists have maintained that this type of parental involvement had a negative effect on a student’s development, learning, and engagement. Contrary to this belief, the NSSE study found that those students whose parents were more involved also reported “higher levels of engagement and more frequent use of deep learning activities” (p. 25) as well as

“greater gains on a host of desired college outcomes, and greater satisfaction with the college experience” (p. 25). Donovan and McKelfresh identified four factors, including familial encouragement and support for higher education, as indicators of higher education success. Parents expect to be informed concerning their student’s life, especially if they are encumbering some, or all, of the financial burden. FERPA provides an exception for parental notification if the student is a dependent, and allows notification for alcohol and other drug violations (Henning, 2007).

As the student population becomes more diverse, so will the concept of family and the way families interact with both their student and the university. Studies show that some cultural and racial groups view family involvement as essential. Latino and Asian traditions emphasize a more collective value in relationships, with children expected to remain close to their parents, even as adults (Sue & Sue, 2008). First generation students appear to need and benefit from parental interest and involvement in their college experience (ACHA, 2008).

University Perspective

Institutions have historically viewed parental involvement as an unnecessary element in the education of students. Parents would pay tuition, attend family weekend, and donate to the foundation, but little more was expected or desired from them. In the Governor’s Report on the Virginia Tech Shootings (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007), one of the key recommendations, because Cho denied a past history of mental illness, is that “universities should recognize their responsibility to a young, vulnerable population

and promote the sharing of information internally, and with parents, when significant circumstances pertaining to health and safety arise” (p. 54). The report also stated, “Repeated incidents of aberrant, dangerous, or threatening behavior should be reported to the counseling center and reported to parents” (p. 54). A further recommendation stated that a policy “should be implemented to address what information can be shared with family” (p. 54).

The Wisconsin Governor’s Task Force on Campus Safety (Office of the Governor, Wisconsin, 2007), offered similar recommendations such as creating a sense of urgency and shared responsibility for the safety of campus by including “student organizations, families, and community members” (p. 1). The report also stated that “family members have regular contact with students, faculty and staff and will be the most likely to notice changes in behavior or development of significant threatening tendencies” (p. 17). Building relationships with parents serves to enhance “institutional boundaries of influence,” enrollment, retention, financial and human resources, and overall institutional support (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008, p. 385).

The Parent, Student, and University Relationship

While parents, students, and the university have always been connected in some way, the nature of that relationship has been, and will continue to be fluid, depending on the societal context in which the university experience occurs. It is essential to acknowledge that all stakeholders have the same goal, the student’s academic and personal development. Perhaps no other motto expresses the current philosophy like *In*

Consortio Cum Parentibus, or In Partnership with Parents. In this model, parents are treated as valued assets to both the student and the institution, although the primary relationship is still between the student and the institution (Henning, 2007).

In Loco Parentis

The philosophical relationship between parents and the institution has historically been *In Loco Parentis*, established in 1913 in the court case of *Gott v. Berea*. It defined that parents transfer authority for the student to the university and, in their best interest. However, the student has few responsibilities, while the university, in return, the university was expected to watch over the students not just academically, but in every aspect of their lives. This begs the question: "If the college could discipline like a parent, must it also protect like a parent?" (Henning, 2007, p. 540). When something happened to a student, courts typically sided with the institution and there were few legal ramifications. The expectation was simply for reasonable care of students.

Recent Perspectives

As society changed in the 1960s, so did college expectations, based on an increasing number of non-traditional students on campus, the age of majority being lowered from 21 to 18, the liberalization of values by students, the increased awareness of civil rights, and a general spirit of challenging authority (Henning, 2007). *Dixon v. Alabama Board of Education* in 1961 is seen as the legal demise of *in loco parentis*.

Several models have been suggested to define the current student-university relationship—the constitutional model, the contract model, the fiduciary model, and the bystander model. The constitutional model states that college students must be afforded

due process based on the United States Constitution's responsibility to protect citizens. Beckham and Dagley (2005) labeled this the legal orientation. The flaw in this model is that private colleges are not required to offer the same protections. The contract model evolved out of the rise of civil and economic rights. As with other contracts, each party has rights and responsibilities, but students do not have negotiating power. The fiduciary model is based on a trust that colleges will act in the best interest of their students. Students are asked to provide information to allow the institution to act in their best interest. However, the student has few responsibilities, while the institution has many. Finally, the bystander, or no duty model, implies that the institution has no responsibility to its students beyond the classroom. Since students are adults, they, not the institution, are responsible for their behavior (Henning, 2007).

The 1980s and 1990s ushered in an age of accountability as constituents both inside and outside higher education demanded evidence that colleges and universities were providing what they promised. In response, institutions began to reach out in more transparent and measurable ways. The emphasis has been on providing services and programs to assist students in all aspects of their lives, including mental health. Perceived failure to provide expected services and care often results in a negligence lawsuit on behalf of the parents (ACHE, 2008; Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008). Some have suggested that recent court cases may be precursors to the return of *in loco parentis* (Henning, 2007).

Mental Health and the University Student

While the college years have always been steeped in change and challenge, today's university students face serious problems (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004). College officials report an increasing number of students coming to campus armed with a history of mental illness and a prescription (Office of the Governor, Wisconsin, 2007). College counseling centers across the United States are reporting an increasing trend in the need for, and utilization of, mental health services. In a 2007, survey conducted by the American College Counseling Association, 91.5% of campuses reported a "greater number of students with severe psychological problems" and 87.5% said more students were arriving on campus already on medication. In 1994, the number of college students on psychiatric medications was reported at 9%, but today has risen to 23.3% (Gallagher, 2007). Studies by others have found similar results (Benton, 2003; Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004).

Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, and Benton, (2003) described the phenomenon of "spiraling" in which a student wants a fresh start, or to be an adult, and discontinues medication at college. Other changes that contribute to an increase in medication problems include the stress of being away from home, parents not available to monitor medication, the emotional instability of college life, interpersonal conflicts, newly found independence, and hormonal changes. Insurance issues, inaccessibility of previous health care providers, and negative feelings about medication all contribute to the large number of students who do not take their medication on a consistent basis (Cooper, 2007).

The 2007 National Survey of Counseling Center Directors found 8.5% of college students had sought counseling the past year. The greatest concerns of directors (62%) were finding referrals for students requiring long-term help, and administrative issues related to the handling of students with more serious psychological problems (61%). Ninety-one percent of directors reported that the recent trend toward greater numbers of students with severe psychological problems continues to be true on their campus, with 49% of their clients having severe psychological problems and 7.5% having impairment so severe that they could not remain in school without serious psychiatric help. Eighty-five percent of directors reported an increased level of concern on campus about liability risks regarding student suicides. Over 30% reported that policies are being revised about communicating with the parents of students in crisis, and the pressure to share more information with the administration is increasing (Gallagher, 2007). Involving parents of at-risk students when there is suicidal ideation or attempt has been proposed by several outside observers and campus officials (Baker, 2006; Kadison & Di Geronimo, 2004).

The Importance of the Virginia Tech Incident

On April 16, 2007, a senior student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, or Virginia Tech, went on a shooting rampage and killed 32 students and faculty and wounded an additional 17, before killing himself. This event stunned the higher education community and institutions began to question their ability to identify, assess, and respond to students with the obvious mental health issues and behaviors that

the shooter, Seung Hui Cho, exhibited. In August of 2007, a state review panel released the Governor's Report, which provided a thorough analysis of the incident and recommendations for best practices. One of the key findings was the failure of Virginia Tech to contact the Cho's parents, who not only had information on his past mental health history, but also indicated they would have sought treatment if they had been informed of his ongoing issues. Virginia Tech stated federal privacy laws prohibited them from making that contact.

After the release of the Governor's Report (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007), higher education institutions nationwide began to review and strengthen their policies and procedures for campus safety, and specifically, identifying and intervening with students of concern. A new discussion, both at the Department of Education and at individual institutions, concerning when it is permissible to contact parents ensued.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), or Buckley Act of 1973, is a federal law that protects the privacy of students' educational records and applies to all schools who receive funding from the Department of Education. Educational records include virtually all information maintained by an educational institution, in any medium, that is directly related to a student's educational progress, performance, or achievement. Thus, 'education records' include not only transcripts, but also letters of recommendation, disciplinary records, and financial aid records. In the K-12 system, parents own the rights to their children's records, but that right is transferred to the student at age 18, or when they enter a postsecondary institution. Thus, access to education records is restricted without written consent from

The context in which the decision to contact parents is made ultimately stems from the legal structure and restrictions that govern the privacy of a student's education and health information. There are several acts that pertain to higher education on the federal level, with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act being a state statute. System and institutional policies add an additional layer of consideration. While these laws and policies attempt to provide clear standards for implementation, practical application leads to varying interpretations. The following are the primary mandates applicable to university students with mental health concerns.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and its predecessor, Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, forbid discrimination on the basis of a mental disability, defined as a person who has (a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, (b) has a record of such an impairment, or (c) is regarded as having such an impairment. The exception to ADA protection is a “direct threat to the health and safety of others that cannot be eliminated by a modification of policies, practices, or procedures or by the provision of auxiliary aids or services” (U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, 2009, para. 2). The ADA has played a more prominent role in notification of parents as the number of students with diagnosed mental disabilities has increased.

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virtually all information maintained by an educational institution, in any format, that is personally identifiable to one or more of its past or present students. Thus, ‘education records’ include not only transcripts, but coursework, most counseling records, disciplinary records, electronic data, post-it notes-and much more! (MnSCU, 2008, para. 3)

In the K-12 system, parents own the rights to their children’s records, but that right is transferred to the student at age 18, or when they enter a postsecondary institution. Then, access to university records is restricted without written consent from

the student. An exception is made for students who are dependents as documented by federal tax returns. The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Office of General Counsel emphasizes:

Striking the appropriate balance between respecting student privacy and disclosing information for safety concerns is critical. Accurate knowledge of the circumstances under which data privacy laws permit disclosure of certain student information can empower administrators to take timely and appropriate action in exigent circumstances. Thinking in advance about the policy choices that FERPA allows will result in better and faster decision making when issues arise. (MnSCU, 2008, para. 2)

The most commonly used exception is the “health and safety emergency” which allows parental notification in specific situations. A compliance officer at the United States Department of Education defined a health and safety exception as a “specific situation that presents imminent danger to a student, other students, or other members of the school community” and must be “narrowly tailored considering the immediacy, magnitude, and specificity of information concerning the emergency” (Capone III, 2007, p. 4.) To rise to the level of a direct threat, there must be a high probability of substantial harm and not just a slightly increased, speculative, or remote risk. A clarification of this standard was released last year which removed the strict construction language and replaced it with an “articulable and significant” threat (MnSCU, 2009, para. 5). In these cases, disclosure of records is permissible “to appropriate parties in connection with an emergency, if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals” (MnSCU, 2008, para. 6). Although MnSCU institutions are encouraged to have a written FERPA policy, each institution has been left to clarify what the above definitions mean and how

they will be applied. University administrators have to determine when a student's situation has met the level of described. Another option available to administrators concerned about a student is to share their personal observations and opinions, which are not considered part of the educational record, with parents.

In 1998, responding to several high profile student alcohol deaths, FERPA was amended by Congress to also allow parental notification for a student under the age of 21 who violates the alcohol or drug policy. Although not extended to other student concerns, results from alcohol and other drug parental notification programs at universities have proven effective (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004). In Minnesota, the MGDPA prevents these notifications.

The Department of Education stated, "In all of our programs here at the Department of Education, we consistently encourage parents' involvement in their children's education. FERPA is no exception" (FERPA, 2008, p. 3). Despite increased discussion and federal clarifications, when FERPA permits parental notification remains unclear on many campuses.

Health Insurability Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

The Health Insurability Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 is the primary federal law governing the privacy of health records. On a university campus, this generally affects student health and mental health providers. FERPA supersedes HIPAA and, therefore, in most cases, HIPAA restrictions are of limited concern.

Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA)

While federal laws provide a basic structure to data privacy, the state of Minnesota has a more restrictive law, the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA). Some of the exceptions that are permitted on a national level, such as parental notifications for alcohol and other drug violations, are not permitted in Minnesota due to the precedence of the MGDPA. Recent Department of Education clarifications and apparent easing of criteria for contacting parents under FERPA is negated in Minnesota because of the more restrictive MGDPA.

Synthesis of the Research

Much has been written about the changing climate in higher education as administrators adapt to the expectations of millennial students and their parents. The legal context provides additional considerations, especially in relation to the privacy of student educational records. With an increasing number of students attending college who have diagnosed and documented mental health issues, it is a challenge to provide adequate services (Gallagher, 2007). The Virginia Tech tragedy stunned the higher education community and served as a catalyst for a re-examination of policies and procedures, including notification of parents, when a student has significant mental health concerns.

Summary

In summary, the literature addresses the changing status of students, parents, and institutions, along with their relationship. The culture of today's society brings

challenges to students in the area of mental health as evidenced by the Virginia Tech incident. Responding to students who are at risk for mental health concerns is an important task for administrators. The option to contact parents is limited by federal and state privacy laws. How the decision to notify parents is made and on what criterion, is yet to be explored.

Chapter III outlines the methodology and procedures used in the study. A theoretical basis for the research design and method are also discussed.

This study used qualitative research methods to assess current policies and informal criteria used to make parental notification decisions for students with mental health concerns. Through semi-structured interviews with an administrator at each of the seven MnSCU universities, a clearer picture of how and when parents are notified and the expectations of that contact also emerged. This chapter outlines the methodology and procedures of the study.

Human Subjects Approval

The St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the researcher's committee approved the study before the researcher interviewed participants. In an effort to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants in this study were adequately protected, all requirements set forth by the St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board were strictly adhered to. There were no foreseeable discomforts or risks involved with participation. The terms of modified consent, presented in the consent form (Appendix B), allowed for voluntary participation.

Participant Selection

The participants for this study consisted of one administrator from each of the seven MnSCU universities, an intentional selection of participants using homogeneous sampling. The Senior Student Affairs Official (SSAO) or designee at each university was contacted, given an overview of the purpose of the study, and asked to provide the

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

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Profile of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System consists of 25 technical and community colleges and seven state universities across the state of Minnesota.

MnSCU is the largest single provider of public higher education in Minnesota, with 250,000 students in credit based courses and 34,000 graduates each year (MnSCU, 2009, para. 1).

The seven state universities in the system are listed in Table 1. For reference, the full-time student equivalencies and the offering of a residence (housing) program is also given.

(Appendix C), data was collected from Table 1

Profile of the Universities in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System

The first interview also served as a pilot study and, based on the data collected

Institution Name	Full-time Equivalent Students (2008 Academic Year)	Residence Life Program
Bemidji State University	4,220	Yes
Metropolitan State University	4,600	No
Minnesota State University- Mankato	13,222	Yes
Minnesota State University- Moorhead	6,661	Yes
St. Cloud State University	14,070	Yes
Southwest State University	3,689	Yes
Winona State University	7,991	Yes

The Interview Guide

A qualitative researcher is “like a quilt maker or jazz improviser. The quilter stitches, edits and puts slices of reality together” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5).

Asking questions and collecting data, the researcher works towards understanding emerging themes, illuminating issues, and exploring possible explanations. This study focused on the unique perspective that administrators who are responsible for parental notification have concerning parental involvement for a student of concern. Through a semi-structured interview consisting of both open- and closed-ended questions,

(Appendix C), data was collected from participants and formed the basis of the research findings.

The first interview also served as a pilot study and, based on the data collected during that interview, questions were revised for subsequent interviews. An additional question was also added which asked participants to share one experience of parental notification. These stories added an anecdotal and concrete dimension to the interview data.

Nine questions formed the interview guide. Question 1 asked participants to estimate the number of times they notified parents in a typical month and year. This provided the extent of notifications at each institution. Question 2 asked about the formal policies at the participant's institution, followed by Questions 3 and 4, which addressed the informal policies and criteria that participants were using when there was no formal policy to guide decision-making. The expectations when contacting a parent and if those expectations were realized comprised Questions 5 and 6. The seventh question asked participants to share a memorable experience in contacting a parent.

The participants for this study included one administrator at each of the seven Mid-Atlantic State University (MnSCU) universities. The Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) or designee at each university was asked to identify the administrator who makes most of the parental notification decisions. The researcher then contacted this administrator, explained the purpose of the research study, and asked for participation in a 30- to 45-minute audio recorded interview. Due to time limitations, three in-person interviews were conducted at the host university of the participant and the remaining four were phone interviews.

Research Design

The researcher used a semi-structured interview design. Several questions were asked for each of the three research questions of the study. Questions were both open- and closed-ended. The depth of probing in each question was based on the participant's answers to previous questions. In this way, each interview had a framework, but also allowed for differences among the participants and the uniqueness of the institutions they represented. Qualitative research, by its nature, also includes design flexibility. The interview questions evolved as the study progressed and the researcher's understanding of relevant issues broadened. For instance, in the first interview conducted, the participant suggested asking each interviewee to share a story about a time he or she had to make the decision to call parents and the results of that decision. This suggestion was incorporated into the subsequent interviews and proved to be one of the most interesting and informative pieces of data collected.

Procedures

The participants for this study included one administrator at each of the seven MnSCU universities. The Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) or designee at each university was asked to identify the administrator who makes most of the parental notification decisions. The researcher then contacted this administrator, explained the purpose of the research study, and asked for participation in a 30- to 45-minute audio recorded interview. Due to time limitations, three in-person interviews were conducted at the host university of the participant and the remaining four were phone interviews. Each interview was randomly assigned a number from one through seven for identification purposes. The connection between a number and the corresponding participant was known only to the researcher. A copy of each

When a participant agreed to the interview, the consent form and interview protocol, with questions, were sent with a confirmation of the interview date, time, and location. For interviews that occurred over the phone and when there was insufficient time to mail these materials, the consent form and protocol were sent electronically.

Prior to the interview, the administrator was given an opportunity to ask questions concerning the interview questions or procedures of the study and then signed the consent form. For phone interviews, verbal consent was requested at the time of the interview and a printed consent form was mailed with the transcript for review.

The interview focused on three primary research questions; the formal policies by which parental notification decisions were being made, the informal criteria and procedures used when a formal policy was not being used, and the participant's expectations in contacting parents, including the degree to which those expectations were met. The role of the Virginia Tech shooting as a catalyst for reexamination of policies and procedures was also explored. Several interview questions targeted each of the research questions.

Interviews were audio taped and field notes were taken by the researcher. Interviews were transcribed in their entirety by the researcher and all identifying information was removed. In place of the institution name, the researcher substituted the word "institution." Specific names mentioned during the interview were replaced in the transcript with the position title. Each interview was randomly assigned a number from one through seven for identification purposes. The connection between a number and the corresponding participant was known only to the researcher. A copy of each

interview was recorded onto an audio CD and kept in the researcher's safe. The transcripts, CDs, and other study materials will be disposed of 3 years after the completion of the researcher's degree.

Initial content analysis of the substantive statements in the unstructured text data, with salient themes and patterns, was completed during transcription. By using interpretive research techniques, the researcher made personal assessments as to the themes that captured the categories of information collected. Notations were made on each transcript on topics addressed. When more than one participant mentioned a topic, that topic was noted as an emerging theme. The researcher also identified areas of convergence and data that did not fit the developing norm. This exploratory analysis served two purposes. First, it provided the beginning conceptualization of themes and patterns based on the interview content, and second, it suggested topics and probes for future interviews.

When the transcriptions were completed and initial themes identified, the interview material was cut and pasted onto note cards coded by theme. Each code was a two- to four-word phrase that represented a key idea, concept, or topic of the interview. There was a code for each of the three interview questions and one for each of the themes that emerged during transcription. When all interview material had been coded, the cards for each theme were analyzed. This provided a general overview of the data and a check as to the accuracy and completeness of the codes in encompassing all of the interview material.

For purposes of validation and triangulation, two reviews of the raw data and themes occurred. The transcripts and field notes were examined by an outside observer who performed independent content analysis and provided both written and oral feedback to the researcher. Each interview was known to the outside observer only through the random identification number. Each participant was provided a written transcript of the interview and given an opportunity to make revisions. The themes identified from the interviews were also given to each participant for review and feedback.

Summary

This study was designed to explore the official policies and the informal criteria that administrators at MnSCU universities use to make parental notification decisions when students are at-risk for mental health concerns. By interviewing the administrators who make those decisions, formal policies and informal criteria relating to parental notification was ascertained and the data was analyzed for themes and patterns. Data on participants' expectations of parental notification were also gathered. An outside observer conducted independent analysis on the interview data. As a reliability check, participants had the opportunity to revise the transcript of their interview and provide feedback on the identified themes.

Chapter IV will address the results of each interview question. Also discussed will be the related themes that emerged from the data. Data that supports or contrasts

policies, procedures, and experiences among the various MnSCU institutions will be highlighted.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the policies and criteria used by MnSCU universities in making parental notification decisions. An administrator at each of the seven institutions was interviewed in regard to formal and informal policies, experiences with parental notification, and the role the Virginia Tech tragedy played in influencing the development of, or changes in, the institution's philosophy and procedures in addressing students of concern.

Profile of Participants

This research study collected interview data from one administrator at each of the seven MnSCU universities. Participants were identified by the Senior Student Affairs Officer or designee at their respective institution as the administrator who makes most parental notification decisions. The participants confirmed prior to the interview that they did have primary responsibility in notification of parents. The positions represented in the study included: Vice President for Student Affairs, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, Chief Judicial Affairs Officer, Director of Counseling, Assistant Director for Residence Life, and two Deans of Students.

Types of Parental Notification

Participants were asked how often in a typical month or year they initiated contact with parents for a student mental health concern. One participant indicated he had yet to contact a parent, but had been in a position for less than a year. The most frequent university-initiated parental notification was approximately once per month.

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Participant 6 stated, "Contacting parents needs to be another tool you keep in the toolbox, but we don't rely on it that much." Some participants noted that others on campus may also make parental notifications, most commonly Residence Life or Counseling Center staff; their answer represents only their notifications. It is important to note that there are other reasons parents are contacted, including physical health and conduct issues. Those circumstances were not considered for this study, but were mentioned by the participants as more frequent than mental health parental notifications. Also of note is that the university initiating contact with a parent is the least common form of university-parent contact. Parents will also contact the university, as Participant 2 said, "Parents will often initiate contact with me or in conjunction with their son or daughter more often than that, and that's probably about five times a month." He further described the most common university to parent contact:

But to be frank, I also threaten students with making that call as well. Threaten is probably an ill-advised word, but my purpose in doing that is to let the student know that 'I'm concerned about your behavior. And I'm going to make that phone call unless you make the phone call first, and by the way, when you make the phone call, I'm going to give you 24 hours, and here's my phone number and if I haven't heard from your

parents in 24 hours, I'm going to call them and make sure you talked to them.'

Participant 5 suggested another option, "The few times that we do strongly encourage students to notify parents we typically have the student notify the parents formal, in writing, a policy that's out there for public consumption." He went on to explain, "We will certainly be the support person, if they want to call from our office, fantastic."

Finally, students will involve parents. Participant 6 recalled campus security searching a residence hall room for marijuana, and the student "was on the phone to her mom at the same time. And then she was saying 'My mom says you can't do that.'"

Results for Research Question 1

What is the current policy at MnSCU universities regarding parental notification of students at-risk for mental health concerns? Participants were asked about their understanding of the formal policies for parental notification at their institution. Most participants referenced the national and state laws mentioned in the literature review, specifically FERPA and MGDPA as the basis for their decisions.

All of the participants stated that there was no formal policy for the institution outside of the guidelines provided in the federal and state laws and occasional clarifications by the MnSCU General Counsel. Participant 2 stated:

The written policy is we don't have a specific policy. Well, we do and don't. We don't have an institutional policy, we have a system policy and that's based on state and federal law, and for the most part mirrors the federal regulations and the federal criteria.

Three participants mentioned the criteria in FERPA and HIPAA as being “imminent risk to themselves or somebody else” and “substantial risk.” Participant 1 stated, “There’s been a pretty conscious decision not to move forward with something formal, in writing, a policy that’s out there for public consumption.” He went on to explain:

We are firmly aware and completely up to date on the changes that are happening with FERPA and HIPAA in relation to disclosure, and feel we have the right to do it, to contact the family, and kind of left it that way. We prefer that to a statement about when we will and when we won’t.

Other participants indicated that their institution had discussed, but decided against, a formal policy. Participant 3 stated:

I wouldn’t want to develop something formal that would take the decision out of my hands, that subjectivity out of my hands because I think it’s important to weigh each and every case. Certainly, in each situation I will weigh if family notification is a good thing for the University and for the student.

Participant 4 reported the institution does have a fairly formal procedure for who is consulted in the decision to contact parents.

So, while most institutions had some parts of parental notification in a structured procedure or protocol, an intentional decision had been made to not develop a comprehensive policy that formalized parental notification decisions.

Results for Research Question 2

What criteria are being used to make a parental notification decision when the policy is unclear or not applicable to the situation? Since participants indicated they did not have a formal policy at their institution, the criteria by which parental notification

decisions are made, and who makes those decisions becomes increasingly important.

Participants commented on two aspects of informal criteria; the first is the procedure used in making a decision, while the other refers to the criteria itself. Parental contact procedure is not policy, but there is often a general understanding and guidelines as to who is consulted and how a decision is made. Participant 7 stated:

We don't have written guidelines, but what is consistent is that we talk about these students as a team. So that would be the consistent approach, and then what we do is completely independent, based on what is going on with the student and what is best for the student.

Participant 6 also mentioned the Student Behavioral Intervention Team's review of the situation as the standard procedure for assessing if parental contact should be made.

Most institutions have select administrators who are responsible for making parental contact. Participant 2 acknowledged:

What happens is that when people are concerned enough that they want to call student's parents, they are going to make sure that students are referred to our office so that I'm making that call. Bottom line is that it's rare that someone else is making that call.

Six participants mentioned consulting or informing the Senior Student Affairs Officer, and the MnSCU General Counsel or the Attorney General's office as part of their decision-making process. In contrast, Participant 4 indicated, "Most of the time we make that decision alone."

Participants used a variety of assessments and factors as criteria for parental notification decisions. Participant 2 stated:

If there's an unofficial policy, again, this is one of those areas where it depends on who you talk to. I'm going to do what I think I need to do, and

I know that's not helpful to you because that's a vague criteria but I'm going to do what I have to when I think the student's at risk.

Participant 5 declared:

Usually when I get to the point where I want parental involvement, the student is sitting on a fence where they could go either way, related to their ability to manage their environment and stick around. I feel at that point that contacting the parents is important because if they are not going to be here, family is likely where they will go.

Participant 5 continued, "If the student is staying, we rarely contact the parent. We

have a plan for them here." Participant 6 echoed that perspective, "The students here are

here on their own. We would rather students develop on their own and make their own mistakes." Five participants said they assess the relationship between the student and

the parent as criteria for making parental notification. Participant 3 commented, "In

each and every circumstance with a student in crisis, emotionally or behaviorally, I use my skills I've learned through counseling and crisis management as options for support.

One of those areas to explore is family support." Specifically mentioned as factors in a

parental notification assessment is the length of time since the student has lived at

home, if the student is ostracized from the family and extreme circumstances in the past, such as abuse or incest. On the other hand, at Institution 4, "We really just have one

criterion, and that is transport to the hospital. And you asked about grey areas and there really isn't any, our bottom line is transport to the hospital." When asked if his

institution tried to assess the student's relationship before making that call, the response was, "It's standard. We always contact the parent."

Participant 3 explained:

Participant 2 said one of the criteria is a student at risk who is refusing help or appears to be incapable of understanding the level of risk, "I'm going to make the decision that I think needs to be made in order to benefit the student." She cited the well-known stand in Student Affairs:

Pick your lawsuit. If I think a student is going to get hurt and we are going to get sued, I'm going to call, because I could get sued if I make the wrong decision either way. Do you want to get sued for violating a student's privacy or do you want to be sued for negligence in killing a student? It's an easy choice.

But, though efforts have been made to create criteria for parental notification, caution must be taken in thinking that one administrator can speak for the institution and the administration as a whole. Participant 2 recalled:

There really isn't agreement on what the criteria is. So when you start asking me about what my criteria are, they are professional and personal and not everybody at this institution, much less the system or the state or the country, agree with that. I represent one side.

Results for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked: What is the administrator's expectation for parental involvement, and based on past experience, was that expectation realized?

There are three main times that parents are contacted. First, parents can be contacted in an emerging situation, often for information which will assist the university in understanding the student and planning an intervention. Participant 7 said, "Sometimes it's getting more thorough and complete information, perhaps about a previous treatment plan, care or concerns or incidents that have happened in the past similar to what we are seeing on campus." Participant 2 explained:

I'm assuming that they know more about their son or daughter than I ever will and that they will be able to inform our decision making. You know, if a parent has got information, if the student is acting weird, mom and dad probably know why and it just makes sense to call them to say 'Hey, Danny's acting weird, what's going on?' They will probably tell you in about thirty seconds, and they will probably be able to tell you about diagnoses and all kinds of other things.

Parents are often contacted during an emergency situation. Participant 4's

institution has a policy that parents are notified whenever a student is transported to the

hospital. A "standardized and very formal" script is read to the parents with "very specific things." The script introduces the administrator, informs parent where the

student has been transported, and provides contact information. Participant 6 said he

routinely asks students being transported to the hospital if they want their parents

contacted, and if the situation is serious enough, an administrator will make that

decision for the student. He added that this is often unnecessary though, because "in this age of cell phones kids are usually on the phone to their parents anyway."

Finally, parents may be involved after the incident as the University assists the student in planning follow-up, especially if the student will be leaving the university.

Participant 5 stated, "My goal is to tell the parents what has happened and what we

recommend, and what we feel needs to happen for that student to move forward, to get

their health back and on their feet." The perceived role of parents and the interpretation

of the administration in regards to FERPA combine to determine when parents are

contacted and how they are involved.

Participants also expressed their feelings about parental involvement in general.

Participant 7 said, "What you want to say is 'OK, you've dropped your student off, they

are starting on their journey, and we know what we're doing.' ” But she continued by illustrating how parental involvement is still needed at times:

There are the extreme hoverers and then there are those that you wish would care more. We had a student this fall semester that we got admitted to an inpatient treatment program for alcoholism and it was the best thing that could have happened to that student, that's exactly where they needed to be. But we had to do it without any family support and that was heartbreaking, absolutely heartbreaking.

Participant 5 stated, “I think the worse thing a university can do is to think ‘We called the parents, now they will take care of it, get the student some type of care.’ Now that we have called the parents we have a duty of care.” Participant 2 had a contrasting opinion, “You know, they pay the bill for the most part, and they should be involved. In my opinion, they are a major player and I’m going to respect that role.”

Positive experiences with parents were mentioned by all of the participants. “I have never had a parent not be thankful that we have called them” said Participant 6. Participant 7 said, “Most often parents appreciate being contacted. Most parents care deeply about their student and their mental health and want them to be successful and appreciate being involved, particularly if their student is not doing well.”

The most common criteria on whether to contact parents revolve around past issues the student presents and think the student and the institution just need to “try harder” to keep the student in school. Participant 4 said:

Most of all, we expect, or we hope, that they will travel here, come here, from wherever they are, to support them. So we expect, we hope, that they will express concern about the situation number one, and we really, really, encourage them to come here to help out. We hope, and we expect, that they will be thankful that we made the call.

Participant 5 commented on college students by stating it is “that time in a person’s life, between 19 and 27 or 28, there’s a lot going on and they still need the support of their family.” Participant 6 stated “I wouldn’t characterize the reason why we call is just because we can. I would say we have a genuine concern the parental involvement can help the situation.”

Negative reactions to contacting parents were also expressed. These experiences often occur when the student is facing conduct violations as well as mental health issues. When conduct violations are involved, parents may try to defend the student’s actions or justify behavior.

There is also potential for conflict when the university and the parents do not agree on the course of treatment. Participant 7 recalled times that:

The University is trying to hold the student accountable for making poor choices, and the parents are not supporting the University and are enabling the student and not holding them accountable, which, of course, just makes the behavior worse. And that’s too bad, because it’s basically a learning opportunity that the student could have been robbed because of their parent.

At times, administrators determine the student should withdraw from school, but the parents want the student to stay. In other cases, parents minimize the severity of the issues the student presents and think the student and the institution just need to “try harder” to keep the student in school.

A few participants mentioned that sometimes the parents were ignorant of the problem, especially with a developing mental illness. Participant 5 explained, “In some cases where the student thought their parents would be a real help, it hasn’t been that way. Not that the parents have been resistant, but they don’t know how to help.” The

student may not have disclosed to their parent the full extent of their behavior or other facts about the concerns.

A final negative experience is when the parents were fully aware of the student's issues, but as Participant 4 stated:

The student was sent away to college because the parents were tired of dealing with the issues. They hoped that the next steps of having the student being away from home on their own and being on the campus and having support and resources would have resolved some of the issues that they have been dealing with from childhood.

Participant 7 shared a recent experience with a similar parent:

She firmly believed and hoped that going off to college would resolve his issues for him, and that she wouldn't have to deal with the problems he had created for her. She was hoping that someone else could pick up the ball for awhile. She wasn't resistant, but she certainly wasn't offering anymore.

All the participants stated that parents have a lot of influence over the student accessing follow-up services, especially if the student returns home. As one tearful

mom from Institution 5 said, "I've done everything I could, and I'm feeling defeated, and it's my problem, not yours, and I will take it and take care of it and make sure he gets the help he needs at home." Participant 6 recalled his experience with a student diagnosed as being bi-polar, whom he felt:

Literally could no longer benefit from going to school, they really needed to start seeing a physician to begin a treatment plan and start trying a medication regimen. Given all that, they needed to stop out and get on top of their health and then re-enroll at a later date.

Synthesis of Research Questions

Three research questions provided the foundation for this study. The first question asked about the formal, written policies used when making parental notification decisions. Participants unanimously stated that their institution did not have a formal parental notification policy, and that was an intentional decision to allow flexibility in addressing each situation individually. The participants indicated that informal procedures and criteria were used for making parental notification decisions. The procedures identified revolved around the specific staff consulted in making the decision and the criteria articulated by the participants indicated a combination of factors determined if they contacted parents. Again, the flexibility to use their expertise and experience on each case appeared to be the preferred method of addressing parental notification decisions.

The last research question referred to the expectations administrators have when making contact with a parent, and if those expectations were realized in their experience. While all the participants articulated both positive and negative experiences with parents, all seemed to expect support for the student and, hopefully, support for the position and recommendations of university personnel. Experience with parents ranged from very negative to very positive and participants indicated that while most parents wanted to be helpful, their lack of knowledge about mental health concerns, or disagreement with the severity or nature of the issues sometimes put the parents at odds with the university. Schlossberg's Theory of Transition stated that in any transition, an appraisal of both the assets and liabilities for coping must be examined. For a student

experiencing a mental health transition or crisis, expecting parents to be either an asset or liability oversimplifies the decision of if, when, and with what expectations, to notify parents. Schlossberg defined "affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback" as the foundations of support (Evans et al., 1998, p. 114). Based on the experience of study participants, parents often can, but may not, provide those supports to a student with a mental health concern.

In addition to the three research questions, additional information emerged from the interview data. The following section discusses themes based on that information and their relevance to the topics of student mental health issues and parental notification.

Identified Themes

In analyzing the study interviews, several themes emerged as germane to the issue of parental notification. These themes were based on information mentioned by most of the participants. The Virginia Tech tragedy and its effect on campus security, faculty, staff, and parental concerns, and Student Behavioral Intervention Teams will be discussed. The issue of mental health and the role of behavior are also identified themes. Finally, the importance of relationships, within and outside of the University community will be focused on.

The Importance of Virginia Tech

As detailed in the literature review, the Virginia Tech shooting was a wake-up call. The tragic death of so many students followed by a comprehensive report of the

incident provided an incentive for institutions to review their campus safety policies and strengthen how troubled students were identified and assessed.

Teams When asked about the effect of the Virginia Tech incident on their institution, participants stated that it did not change their basic philosophy or procedures in relation to parental notification. They indicated that they could, and did, contact parents before Virginia Tech, and continued to do so, but now there is more campus-wide discussion on the topic. The following sections detail other ways that Virginia Tech has influenced campuses related to increased awareness and discussion around issues of mental health, students of concern, campus safety, and emergency procedures. Most Student Behavioral Intervention Teams were created, or strengthened, after the release of the Virginia Tech report, which cited lack of information sharing and collaboration among various parts of the university as a major flaw in Virginia Tech's intervention with Cho. More intentional communication and increased partnership between the student affairs and academic divisions of the university was often cited as one result of Virginia Tech. Finally, the need for external partnerships to meet the growing number of students with significant mental health concerns was noted.

Campus Security

General campus security and emergency procedures are being reviewed and strengthened at MnSCU institutions. Participant 1 said there was a "much more prominent concern about campus safety in general and concern about campus security officers, and procedures in an emergency" as a result of Virginia Tech. New

approaches to emergency notifications and crisis response teams have been developed. It was out of a concern for campus safety that most Student Behavioral Intervention Teams were created.

Increased Faculty and Staff Concern

The campus community is more aware of the potential for those who act, dress, or talk in an abnormal way to act out. Virginia Tech has impacted student affairs as evidenced by the increasing citation number of faculty and staff who contact administrators to report students of concern as mentioned by the study participants.

While many of these referrals are welcomed by the Student Behavioral Intervention Team and others who know the importance of early identification of troubled students, it has had a negative effect on tolerance for those who are simply different or odd.

Participant 1 stated faculty are more likely to report incidents or students with the expectation that conduct officers or counseling services will solve the problem or "fix them." Participant 5 reported, "I am still inundated with calls from faculty who see our office as the office of the Assistant Principal. And they want to send him or her to our office. And that's one of the residual effects of Virginia Tech." In response, four

institutions have developed publications to assist faculty and staff in evaluating and responding to students who exhibit odd behavior. Two participants mentioned conducting workshops for faculty on these issues and three stated that they routinely field calls from faculty to want to guidance on concerning student behavior.

Increased Parental Concern

A significant change in parental expectations has led to more discussion about what level of parental involvement is appropriate and how to provide information so parents can understand developmental processes and what is and is not supporting their students. Participant 1 indicated that his former institution developed a parent orientation to assist parents in “appropriate strategies for encouraging students to develop independence for themselves while not completely cutting them loose, what resources were available and what the university can or can’t do.”

Participant 1 continued, “We see more interest, more concern, on the part of parents now than before.” He further stated that there is a need, “to have a balance in a respect for student’s privacy as adults and concern for them”. Participant 5 added:

It hasn’t directly changed our protocol. But, it has changed to be a more major part of the conversation about protocol. We are more aware of the parental notification option than we have ever been before. Since I started here it’s always been on the table, it’s always been something we are aware we can do, but now, more than ever, with the changes in FERPA, it’s something we could do.

Student Behavior Intervention Teams

Five participants mentioned having a team that meets on a regular basis to evaluate and intervene for students of concern. These teams “share information so there is a big picture and you would get a timely and strategic intervention that fits that student and what’s going on with them,” according to Participant 7. She continued, “Each week we meet and we decide what is the situation with the student, how best to intervene, and who best to do that intervention.” Various names are used to reflect the

nature of these groups such as Behavior Intervention Team, Student Behavior Intervention Team, Behavioral and Emotional Review, and Behavioral Consultation Team. While teams were created to provide a mechanism for a thorough evaluation of a student from all divisions of the University, the authority of these teams to act in parental notification was limited, according to the participants. Participant 1 stated that his institution did not have available personnel or financial resources for a team at this time, but felt it would be of benefit. The last participant said her institution was in the process of developing a team.

Student Mental Health

Student mental health is an issue on every higher education campus. Recently, the issue has grown in prominence as administrators deal with a perceived or documented increase in students with mental health issues and formulate responses that focus on the behaviors exhibited, rather than the diagnosis itself. To be accommodating to those with mental health challenges while upholding the behavioral standards of the University community was the next theme that emerged from the study findings.

Increase in Students with Mental Health Issues

As discussed in the literature review, several studies have documented the increase in both the number of students with mental health concerns and the severity of those concerns (ACHA, 2008; Gallagher, 2007). This increase has strained counseling and student health services on many campuses (Gallagher, 2007). Four participants

mentioned the increasing number of students who are coming to their institution with a history of mental health issues. Participant 4 stated:

Based on reports from Disability Services, our Counseling Center, and from Health Services, we know from all of them that there are an increased number of students expressing mental health concerns and on medication. Given the research, we fully expect that to increase.

Participant 1 said some therapists see college enrollment as a “therapeutic act” for their clients, failing to realize the stress that college requirements can have on a person who already has significant emotional challenges. Participant 5 spoke to another reason that students with mental health issues attend college. Parents and students often see college as a “fresh start” and hope that the mental health issues of the past will decrease, or disappear altogether in the college environment, which they perceive as offering significant resources and support. Other parents express relief that dealing with the student’s issues is now the responsibility of the university.

The Role of Behavior

While this study focused on mental health concerns, four participants emphasized that behaviors, not their cause, are the focus when a student is of concern. Mental health issues may be the underlying reason that a student acts out, but behavior is the basis of the resulting consequences. Participant 5 noted:

We focus on behaviors. Just because someone has Asperger’s or depression or an eating disorder, legally speaking, there’s not a lot you can do about that. Now, if they initiate some behaviors in the residence hall or in the classroom, that’s a whole different issue. I think one thing this campus does a nice job of is paying attention to the behaviors and what behaviors are you seeing and let’s address those.

Participant 2 put it this way:

It's a lot easier to talk about behaviors. If you say to a student, 'you're crazy as a loon', first of all, it's not a helpful term, or appropriate, that's a nicer term, but it's not going to get you where you want to be.

Participant 5 added, "I ask what the behavior is. I think that in terms of mental health and involving parents and involving others, we do a nice job of not thinking about the mental health or disability, but the behaviors."

The Department of Education Office of Civil Rights reinforces the prominence of behavior by continuing to recommend misconduct be addressed, even if that conduct is the result of a mental health issue (Pavela, 2008, p. 1).

The Value of Relationships

In one way or another, all of the participants commented on the importance of relationships in working with students of concern. Most prominently, they mentioned their Student Behavioral Intervention Team as the means to collaborate campus-wide to address at-risk students. Relationships, both internal and external, campus and community, are discussed below under two sub-themes, the importance of having a relationship with community resources, and the benefit of the student affairs and academic divisions of a university working collaboratively.

Internal and External Collaboration

Four participants mentioned having working relationships with the local hospital, inpatient behavioral health unit, and police. Clearly, most, if not all, universities cannot provide all the mental health services students need, so coordination of care with community resources is essential.

“If they are in the hospital in the Behavioral Health Unit, they will have what they call a Care Conference. We can’t require, but we really encourage that someone from our institution is present at the Care Conference, so we are involved in the planning” was how Participant 7 described their relationship with the hospital in student follow-up care. Participant 4 mentioned that their counseling center has developed a relationship with the local hospital so “the nurses will encourage students to sign a release so they can call us,” improving the transition from hospital and return to campus. Participant 1 stated, “We have very limited ability to provide intervention and support in our resources, so there’s an increasing need to bridge some things to the community for mental health support.”

Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration

Four administrators mentioned an increased collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Participant 6 noted that his institution’s team has, “softened the stance between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs.” Four other participants mentioned that the Student Behavior Intervention Team has forged a stronger collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, understanding that both sides of the institution can provide essential information and have a role in addressing students of concern. On the other side, Participant 5 stated, “We have never operated in silos,” indicating that collaboration has always existed.

The Necessity of Resources

Lack of adequate personnel and financial resources was mentioned by every participant. The one institution without a Student Behavioral Intervention Team cited staffing limitations as the main reason. Institutions strive to provide support for students, but are often hampered by finite resources. As Participant 1 said, "We are very limited in terms of what kinds of mental health services and interventions we can provide." Participant 3 added, "You almost have to have a social worker/case manager if you are going to do the whole family coordinate with the doctor." Participant 6 reluctantly admitted, "Well, the University has taken the position that we have to refer people out after four sessions with the counseling center because they don't have the time to deal with it. Frankly, we don't have the resources."

Synthesis of Identified Themes

In analyzing the participant interviews, several themes emerged as germane to the issue of parental notification. The Virginia Tech tragedy served as a wake-up call for campuses to re-evaluate their plans for campus safety and how they identified and addressed students at risk. An increase in the number of parent and faculty concerns about student behavior was noted. All but one campus has created a Student Behavioral Intervention Team to better analyze and respond to identified students of concern. Participants noted an increase in students on their campus with mental health issues and were striving for improved coordination with both the internal and external community to provide the best care for students.

The identified themes mirror the current literature. As institutions strive to meet the demands of a student population that present an expanding need for mental health services and parents continue to be a major source of support for most students, the issue of contacting parents for mental health concerns will continue to be a relevant topic for discussion and policy development.

Summary

Interviews with administrators from the seven MnSCU Universities found that although formal policies were not used in making parental notification decisions, informal procedures and criteria were utilized to address the needs of students of concern, including notification of parents. Each institution had unique procedures and criteria for making parental notification decisions, but all stated that in each situation, the decision needs to foremost focus on what is best for the student and the university. Participants stated that a structured policy cannot assure this. Administrators have expectations in notifying parents, and their experience found that both positive and negative encounters with parents occur. Assuming that parental involvement will always be a support or have a negative effect on a student in crisis is too simplistic. Administrators must assess in each situation when, and how to involve parents. Certain topics, although not central to this study, were connected to the parental notification and student of concern discussion so closely, that many of the participants mentioned them. Specifically, Virginia Tech has led institutions to re-evaluate their campus safety plans, while dealing with increased faculty and parental concerns. One measure adopted by

most MnSCU universities is a campus-wide team to conduct case review and intervention for students of concern, most commonly known as a Student Behavioral Intervention Team. With an increase in students demonstrating mental health issues, collaborative campus and community partnerships and additional resources are essential to providing best practices care.

Chapter V will discuss the conclusions of the study, provide topics for further research, and offer recommendations based on the research findings. A summary of the study will be presented.

Discussion and Conclusions

Three research questions were addressed in this study. The following are conclusions based on the findings of the study. The first question asked what formal policies for parental notification exist at MnSCU Universities. The participants revealed that their universities do not have a formal, written policy, but rely on applicable federal and state laws and MnSCU policy as guidelines. This lack of policy is an intentional decision which enables institutions to respond to each situation on an individual basis. Rather than formal policies, institutions rely on informal procedures

and criteria as the basis for making parental notification decisions. Finally, expectations when contacting parents were explored. All of the participants expressed both positive and negative experiences with parents, based on various factors such as who initiated the contact, the specific nature of the student concern, the student's history, and the parent's willingness to accept the university's assessment of the concern and recommendations for follow up.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study focused on the notification of parents when a student is at-risk due to mental health concerns, and the formal and informal policies that provide guidance for that decision. Additionally, the expectations that administrators have when involving parents and whether those expectations match the reality of the administrator's experience were also examined. Topics related to parental notification and student mental health were also explored. The findings of this study led to the following discussion and conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

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While every institution must follow the guidelines provided by federal and state laws, and MnSCU system directives, this study found that there is still much latitude in when and how individual institutions and administrators involve parents. Since administrators purposefully have not developed policies that address most parental notification decisions, careful attention to who, and how those decisions are being made is essential in providing the best care for students of concern. Also worth further consideration is an analysis of past parental notification decisions as a basis for improving future practice

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study, including:

1. Since the study utilized a combination of phone and in-person interviews, the results may have been affected by the mode of the interview. The researcher noticed more connection with participants when conducting the in-person interviews, but both methods of interviewing yielded the same quality and quantity of data.

2. Since the study used an emerging themes design, topics emerged in later interviews that were not mentioned in previous ones. Thus, some topics were discussed only in selected interviews.
3. Due to the varied positions held and differences in institutions, some study topics were explored in more depth than in others in each interview.
4. Given the targeted participation of the seven MnSCU Universities, the study data was meant to provide an in-depth exploration of that system, and may not apply to other types of higher education institutions.
5. Given that only one administrator was interviewed from each institution, care must be taken in assuming that the views of that administrator represent the position of the entire administration.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the study findings and recent legal clarifications.

In December, 2008, the Department of Education revised the FERPA language that defined the standard for parental notification as "imminent threat" and replaced it with:

If an educational agency or institution determines that there is an articulable and significant threat to the health or safety of a student of other individual, it may disclose the information to any person, including parents, whose knowledge of their information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individual. (Federal Register, 2008, section 99.36)

In May, 2009, the Office of General Counsel for MnSCU released a compliance guide to assist campuses in following the clarified FERPA guidelines. The Guide states:

Each college and university must have a published campus FERPA Policy, that, at a minimum, includes the basic notice requirements of federal law. Additionally, system colleges and universities are strongly urged to have written policies and procedures to address various discretionary matters on handling its educational records. (MnSCU, 2009)

Based on this directive, a formal policy or review of informal procedures for parental notification is one discretionary matter that should be considered under these guidelines. With changes endorsing a lower standard of threat, parental notifications are permitted in more situations. How this affects policy development and decision making on an individual MnSCU campus remains to be seen.

In addition to the MnSCU directive listed above, the researcher offers the following recommendations.

1. Proactive parental involvement would be beneficial. As mentioned in the literature review, most institutions now provide a plethora of programs and services for parents and students rely on their parents for support and advice (NSSE, 2007). Offering mental health information during parent orientation sessions and in materials developed for parents would benefit both the student and the University.
2. Expanding collaborative efforts between both internal and external partners in student mental health care is essential. Priority should be given to

identifying and developing relationships with all available community

resources. Likewise, on-campus resources should be examined to assure that information about students of concern and resources to address those concerns is widely shared within the boundaries of applicable laws and policies.

3. Increasing the availability of information for faculty and staff on addressing students of concern is essential. No Student Behavioral Intervention Team or administrator can identify all students with mental health concerns. A campus-wide commitment to understanding and intervening with students is essential. Workshops, printed materials, and on-line trainings exist to assist campuses in providing information and support for their interactions with students of concern.

4. Creating a campus of care is essential. Ernest Boyer's Six Principles of Community (Evans et al., 1998) stressed that the campus climate must be one that prioritizes caring for others as a core value. Only in this environment can all students, including those with mental health issues, succeed.

5. This study highlighted that each University in the MnSCU system interprets the laws and has developed practices with an individualized approach to when and how parents are involved in mental health concerns. System level discussions among administrators who make parental notification decisions would align policies, procedures, and approaches.

Further Research

The study findings suggest topics for further research.

1. With many institutions creating a Student Behavior Intervention Team, the effectiveness of this approach in identifying, assessing, and providing follow up for students is needed. Best practices for all aspects of developing, managing, and sustaining a Team has yet to be thoroughly researched.
2. As the number of college students with mental health concerns continues to increase, as is predicted, more research will be needed on how to best assure student's success while upholding the behavioral expectations of the university community. While each campus will vary with the types of services available, a comprehensive and intentional plan that balances provision for the growing need for mental health services with the limited resources available must be developed.
3. Research into collaborative efforts for internal and external resources for students of concern is needed. Joint commitment from all stakeholders to providing best care for student will often necessitate partnerships. Institutions and communities who have created successful programs can be identified.
4. Additional research on the role that parents play in supporting students with mental health concerns and how universities can better partner with them to benefit student, parent, and the university is needed. As mentioned in Schlossberg's Theory of Transition, identification of the factors that provide

support for students, and those that hinder students' coping, should be explored. The use of case studies to understand and evaluate how individual parental notifications are made and the result of those decisions would be helpful.

5. As both college students and their families become more diverse, research must focus on how to understand and accommodate all types of family structures in interactions with parents and other family members.
6. Reviewing the unwritten procedures and criteria being used in decisions to notify parents, including who is consulted in those decisions, should be examined by each institution and the MnSCU system as a whole. An analysis of how these informal methods came into existence and assessment to determine if they are an effective method to address university, student, and parent needs should be conducted.
7. Implementing ongoing assessment of the university's expectations for parental notification and if those expectations have been realized would enhance future notification decisions. As the study participants mentioned, there are both positive and negative outcomes to parental involvement. A better understanding of the factors that lead to specific results would be helpful.

Summary

This study examined the formal policies, informal procedures, and criteria used when making a parental notification decision for a student of concern. Furthermore, the expectations for parental notification were examined. Interviews with an administrator at each of the seven MnSCU universities found that while formal policies outside of the national and state laws intentionally do not exist, informal procedures and criteria are used to make parental notification decisions based on the individual student and the situation. Student Behavioral Intervention Teams have become an integral part of identifying and responding to students of concern. As universities experience an increase in students with mental health issues, providing support, including parental support, will be increasingly important. As long as students invite parents into their college experience and parents continue to be involved in their student's life, the issue of how and when, and with what expectations parents will be involved when a student has a mental health concern will be an ongoing issue for university administrators. Adding another layer of complexity is the philosophy of both the individual administrator who makes those decisions and the institution's stance on the role of parents. But, no matter how decisions are made, the ultimate goal for each decision must be the delicate balance between the welfare of the student, the rights of privacy granted by the government, and the best interests of the university.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIXES

Overview of the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act

Overview of the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act regulates the handling of all government data that are created, collected, received, or released by a state entity, political subdivision, or statewide system, no matter what form the data are in, or how they are stored or used.

Briefly, the Act regulates:

- What information can be collected.
- Who may see or have copies of the information.
- The classification of specific types of government data.
- The duties of government personnel in administering the provisions of the Act.
- Procedures for access to the information.
- Procedures for classifying information as not public.
- Civil penalties for violation of the Act, and
- The charging of fees for copies of government data.

Almost all government data are either data on individuals or data not on individuals. Data on individuals are classified as either public, private, or confidential. Data not on individuals are classified as public, nonpublic, or protected nonpublic. This classification system determines how government data are handled. Individuals are classified as either public, private, or confidential. Data not on individuals are classified as public, nonpublic, or protected nonpublic. This classification system determines how government data are handled. The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA) establishes a system of data classification, in general terms, who is legally authorized to access government data.

APPENDIX A

This classification system is constructed from the definitions provided in Minnesota Statutes section 13.02. **Overview of the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act**

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA), its accompanying rules, and related statutes impose specific obligations upon government entities to comply with the procedural requirements of the statute. The MGDPA is Chapter 13 of Minnesota Statutes. The Rules implementing the MGDPA are found in Minnesota Rules, Chapter 1305.

Overview of the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act regulates the handling of all government data that are created, collected, received, or released by a state entity, political subdivision, or statewide system, no matter what form the data are in, or how they are stored or used.

Briefly, the Act regulates:

- ◆ What information can be collected;
- ◆ Who may see or have copies of the information;
- ◆ The classification of specific types of government data;
- ◆ The duties of government personnel in administering the provisions of the Act;
- ◆ Procedures for access to the information;
- ◆ Procedures for classifying information as not public;
- ◆ Civil penalties for violation of the Act; and
- ◆ The charging of fees for copies of government data.

Almost all government data are either *data on individuals* or *data not on individuals*. Data on individuals are classified as either public, private, or confidential. Data not on individuals are classified as public, nonpublic, or protected nonpublic. This classification system determines how government data are handled. individuals are classified as either public, private, or confidential. Data not on individuals are classified as public, nonpublic, or protected nonpublic. This classification system determines how government data are handled. The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA) establishes a system of data classifications that define, in general terms, who is legally authorized to access government data.

This classification system is constructed from the definitions provided in Minnesota Statutes section 13.02.

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA), its accompanying rules, and related statutes impose specific obligations upon government entities to comply with the procedural requirements of the statute. The MGDPA is Chapter 13 of Minnesota Statutes. The Rules implementing the MGDPA are found in Minnesota Rules, Chapter 1205.

Research Participant Consent Form
Parental Notification of University Students At-Risk for Mental Health Concerns
 Margaret Sarnicki, Researcher
 St. Cloud State University

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this research study is to examine the policies and informal criteria used by administrators at MnSCU universities in notifying parents of students at risk for mental health concerns and the expectations of notification. The research instrument is a 30-45 minute audio recorded interview and accompanying field notes.

Confidentiality:

The transcript of the interview, the recorded tape, and interviewer's field notes will be kept in a secure location at the researcher's office. Access will only be given to the St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and to a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement. An outside observer will review the transcript with all identifying information removed to complete independent observations. The administrator will also have the opportunity to review and revise the printed transcript of the interview. In the final study report, each administrator will be identified only through a randomly selected number.

Three years after the completion of the study, the audio recording, transcript, field notes, and other study related materials will be destroyed.

APPENDIX B

Voluntary Nature of Participation:

I do not have to participate in this research project. If I agree to participate, I understand I can withdraw my participation at any time by _____.

Research Participant Consent Form

Opportunity to Review:

I understand that I will be given 1 week to review and revise the transcript of my interview before the study is completed.

Information:

If I have any questions about this research project, I can contact the researcher, Margaret Sarnicki, at (320) 743-2997 or msarnick102@stcloudstate.edu. I may also contact her advisor, Dr. Christine M. Imbra, at (320) 308-1689 or cimbra@stcloudstate.edu.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT, AND I AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Participant's Name _____

Research Participant Consent Form
Parental Notification of University Students At-Risk for Mental Health Concerns
Margaret Sarnicki, Researcher
St. Cloud State University

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine the policies and informal criteria used by administrators at MnSCU universities in notifying parents of students at risk for mental health concerns and the expectations of notification. The research instrument is a 30-45 minute audio recorded interview and accompanying field notes.

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Three years after the completion of the study, the audio recording, transcript, field notes, and other study related materials will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

I do not have to participate in this research project. If I agree to participate, I understand I can withdraw my participation at any time by notifying the researcher in writing.

Opportunity to Review

I understand that I will be given 1 week to review and revise the transcript of my interview before the study is completed.

Information

If I have any questions about this research project, I can contact the researcher, Margaret Sarnicki, at (320) 743-2097 or sama0702@stcloudstate.edu. I may also contact her advisor, Dr. Christine M. Imbra, at (320) 308-1689 or cmimbra@stcloudstate.edu.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT, AND I AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Participant's Name _____

Interview Protocol and Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I appreciate your time and willingness to share your expertise in working with at-risk students and their parents. Before our meeting today, we discussed in a phone conversation the purpose of this interview and of the research study that will result. Do you have any questions on the information we previously discussed?

I am interested in discussing the current policies of the Mark U. university concerning notification of parents for at-risk students. Further, I hope to discover the informed criteria that administrators, such as yourself, are using when policies are implemented, or do not provide sufficient guidance. Finally, I would like to learn of your expectations in informing parents and how your past experience compares with those expectations. Your perspective and experience are invaluable in ascertaining how, and on what basis, notification decisions are being made within the Mark U. university system. There is no "right" way to answer the questions that form the basis of our discussion today. Your experience communicated in your own words is my only expectation.

APPENDIX C

Because your honesty and candid opinions are essential to this study, you and your University will remain anonymous. Today's audio recorded tape, my field notes, and all other study materials relating to you, will only be available to the Institutional Review Board at St. Cloud State University, if you agreed to keep all information confidential. An outside observer will independently review the transcript for accuracy, but all identifying information will be removed before this process. You will have the opportunity to review and revise the transcript of your interview. Three years from the completion of the study all study related materials will be destroyed.

Interview Protocol and Questions

Do you have any questions so far? I welcome your questions at any time during the interview. Also, if you would like to stop the interview at any time, please let me know. Let's begin.

(Begin tape recording). This is Margaret Sarnicki. It is _____ (date), on _____ (date) and I am speaking to _____ (interviewee) _____ (position) from _____ (University).

Today's discussion will revolve around the issue of parental notification for students at your University who are at-risk for mental health concerns. Reflect on and respond to each question in light of your experience and responsibility to make notification decisions. Please feel free to decline to answer any question and to elaborate on each question with examples pertaining to your university. Now let's begin our discussion.

Interview Protocol and Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I appreciate your time and willingness to share your expertise in working with at-risk students and their parents. Before our meeting today, we discussed in a phone conversation the purpose of this interview and of the research study that will result. Do you have any questions on the information we previously discussed?

I am interested in discussing the formal policies of the MnSCU universities concerning notification of parents for at-risk students. Further, I hope to discover the informal criteria that administrators, such as yourself, are using when policies are incomplete or do not provide sufficient guidance. Finally, I would like to learn of your expectations in informing parents and how your past experience correlates with those expectations. Your perspective and experience are invaluable in ascertaining how, and on what basis, notification decisions are being made within the MnSCU university system. There is no "right" way to answer the questions that form the basis of our discussion today. Your experience communicated in your own words is my only expectation.

Because your honesty and candid opinions are essential to this study, you and your University will remain anonymous, referred to in the study only by a randomly chosen identification number. Today's audio recorded tape, my field notes, and all other study materials relating to you, will only be available to the Institutional Review Board at St. Cloud State University, if requested, and a transcriber who has agreed to keep all information confidential. An outside observer will independently review the transcript for accuracy, but all identifying information will be removed before this process. You will have the opportunity to review and revise the transcript of your interview. Three years from the completion of the study all study related materials will be destroyed.

Do you have any questions so far? I welcome your questions at any time during the interview. Also, if you would like to stop the interview at any time, please let me know. Let's begin.

(Begin tape recording). This is Margaret Sarnicki. It is _____(time), on _____(date) and I am speaking to _____(interviewee) _____(position) from _____(University).

Today's discussion will revolve around the issue of parental notification for students at your University who are at-risk for mental health concerns. Reflect on and respond to each question in light of your experience and responsibility to make notification decisions. Please feel free to decline to answer any question and to elaborate on each question with examples pertaining to your university. Now let's begin our discussion.

1. How many times do you contact the parents of a student at risk for a mental health concern in a typical month? In a typical year?
2. What is your understanding of your institution's official policy regarding parental notification for at-risk students? Is there an unofficial expectation or understanding?
3. Do you feel you have a complete understanding of when you can contact parents? (Can you think of situations in which there is a "grey" area?)
4. What are the criteria you use when determining to make or not make a call to parents?
5. What are your expectations when contacting parents? (What do you hope they will contribute to the situation)?
6. Have your experiences with parents differed from your expectations? How?
7. Please share a memorable story about a time you did, or did not, contact parents.
8. Has the Virginia Tech shooting and other campus incidents altered your perception of when to contact parents? In what way (s)?
9. Is there anything you would like to add to our conversation today?

Thank you for participating in this study. I welcome your further thoughts concerning the topic or this study and can be reached using the contact information listed on the consent form.

Interview ended at _____ (time).